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SUBJECT: DARFUR TASK FORCE MEMBER ON JUBA TALKS AND THE FUTURE OF
SUDAN

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On December 6, SPLM Darfur Task Force member Edward Lino asserted that the National Congress Party (NCP) is alarmed by the success of the Juba Darfur initiative and is seeking to thwart its success. He said that the Darfur rebel groups have continued to talk in Juba and make progress toward unity. Now Darfurian Arab groups are exploring joining the process as well. He predicted that a coalition of marginalized peoples could sweep the 2009 national elections and the resulting national government would hold Sudan together beyond the 2011 referendum. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On December 6 in Juba, a confident and expansive Edward Lino discussed with Acting C/G and Norwegian Consular Officer the status of the SPLM's Juba initiative to unite Darfur rebel groups and his take on Sudan's future.

NCP Discomfort at SPLM Success

¶3. (SBU) Lino began by complaining that the NCP is delaying the AU/UN sponsored travel of the United Resistance Front (URF) to consult with their field commanders by denying approval of their flight from Juba to Darfur. The URF delegation had planned to fly that same day, December 6. Lino appealed for the U.S. to intercede with the GNU to grant permission. (Note: Acting C/G was later told by the UN/AU point-man on the SPLM Darfur initiative, based in Juba, that the flight was being delayed by logistical, not political, problems and that Khartoum is working with the UN to allow the flight to Darfur. He indicated that the URF delegation was expected to depart on Saturday, December 8. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) According to Lino, the NCP are angered by the SPLM's success in bringing the Darfur rebel factions together into a cohesive negotiating front. He asserted that the NCP also are annoyed because the SPLM had apprehended and ejected a National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) agent who attempted to penetrate the talks to gather information.

¶5. (SBU) Lino was aware of harsh criticism of him in the Arabic press by GNU Presidential advisor Dr. Mustafa Osman Ismail, but did not appear to have seen the stories themselves or to know precisely what Ismail said. He said that any criticism coming from someone like Ismail is "good." He dismissed NCP "name calling" and said it is a sign of how insecure and threatened the NCP now feels.

Juba Darfur Talks Continue

¶6. (SBU) Lino said that talks between the Darfur rebel factions have continued in Juba after the formal "closing ceremony" on November 29. He said that on Sunday, December 9, SLM/Unity will

formally announce its newly chosen leader, its structure, and present its manifesto. A total of 12 factions now have joined SLM/Unity, he said. (Note: In a conversations with Poloff on December 7, SLM/Unity leaders Suleiman Jamous and Abdullah Yehia denied that any announcement on leadership will be made December 9. According to Jamous and Yehia, SLM/Unity is awaiting the arrival of URF representatives from Juba and SLM/Unity representatives from Libya to conduct consultations on leadership and a future structure of the movements. End note.)

¶7. (SBU) The URF delegation was to have flown from Juba to Darfur December 6 to consult with field commanders and secure their concurrence to agreements made in Juba. They planned to return on Sunday, December 9, to pursue merger with SLM/UNITY into a single front. The SPLM wants to ensure there is no rift between negotiators and the field -- of the kind that has previously led to the proliferation of rebel groups. (Note: At the November 29 ceremony, Lino had said that the only difference separating the SLM/UNITY and the URF was whether they needed to consult with the field before formally uniting. In several recent conversations with Poloff, however, URF and SLM/Unity representatives were equally emphatic that field consultations are essential before making any decisions on leadership or an alliance between the two groups. The political commissar of the Justice and Equality Movement/Collective Leadership (JEM/CL)--the main faction within the URF--told Poloff on December 7 that even the selection of the URF leadership is dependent on the consultations in Darfur, as JEM/CL leader Bahar Idriss Abu Gharda will not arrive from Ndjamena to Darfur until December 10. End note.)

Arab Militias Enter the Juba Process

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¶8. (SBU) Asked about the Darfur Arab groups that are reported to have come to Juba for talks, Lino said they have been meeting with GoSS VP Riek Machar, who is seeking to persuade them to come into the peace process as part of the rebel front. "Peace in Darfur will be incomplete without the Arabs," and they must be brought into the process, he said. He added Janjaweed leader Musa Hillal has not come to Juba, but the SPLM are trying to persuade him to do so.

¶9. (SBU) Asked why the Arab groups are deserting Khartoum and may want to join with the rebels, Lino said that the NCP incited the Arabs to fight its war in Darfur, but never had any plans to reward them for their sacrifice. The Arab militias realize that they were used by Khartoum for its own interests and are bitter. In addition, he said there is a generational split within the Arab tribes, with younger people having a different perspective than their parents. He claimed the NCP is very worried about a possible Arab "intifada" in South Darfur (possibly led by the heretofore quiescent Baggara Rizeigat).

¶10. (SBU) Lino continued that SLM/UNITY and the URF already include Arab factions and that both want to talk with the Arab groups that now have come to Juba. He predicted that the bulk of the Arab factions are likely to join the SLM as the process continues.

A Government of the Marginalized and a United Sudan

¶11. (SBU) Lino predicted that the political situation in Sudan will change radically the next few years. Khartoum now realizes that its old strategy for staying in power no longer works. The marginalized people of Sudan are starting to come together and the NCP fears it is being surrounded. Lino expressed confidence that these groups will vote together in the 2009 elections and elect a "government of the marginalized." He also expressed confidence that these groups would have more than enough qualified people to be able to govern Sudan successfully once in power. The NCP is seeking to thwart this through a strategy intended to delay the elections indefinitely.

¶12. (SBU) Lino said he had no doubt that the people of the South

will support such a national government and a united Sudan. He contended that today's separatists, in the South and elsewhere, really are disappointed Sudanese patriots. They are reacting to decades of being kept from participating in the life of the nation. The Arab tribes of the Nile valley have controlled Sudan's government for their own benefit since independence in 1956. Once their power is broken and the marginalized groups see that they can participate fully, the pressure for separation will fade away.

¶13. (SBU) Comment: The SPLM is feeling its oats with the success of the Darfur mediation, and views itself as the leader of a coalition of the marginalized periphery. (Note: We have heard similar comments from SPLM officials in Khartoum, who now see the SPLM playing a mediation role even outside Sudan, and have offered their assistance negotiating with Ethiopia and Eritrea.) The NCP is certainly concerned by this, and would rather strike a deal with the SPLM for unity after the elections. Knowing this, the SPLM is using the Darfur mediation to put maximum pressure on Khartoum to get what it wants on Abyei and CPA implementation. Darfur Arab unification with the Fur/Zaghawa insurgency is what the NCP fears most, especially if combined with SPLM leadership. However at this point the Arab tribes may be simply "exploring options" to apply their own pressure to Khartoum, to ensure they are taken care of in advance of the next round of peace talks. The SPLM's dream of a grand coalition of the marginalized is still an attractive dream but far from fruition.

FERNANDEZ